

Animal rightists use emotional image to target sow crates

Animal rights campaigners are taking their emotional message about sow housing to consumers in Manitoba.

Since May 8, the Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals (CCFA) and the Canadians for Ethical Treatment of Food Animals (CEFTA) have run television ads in Manitoba, including air time during the Stanley Cup finals, depicting sows behind bars, as in jail cells.

The ads tell viewers that sow stalls are cruel and inhumane. The narrator describes the sows' living conditions and asks viewers to take a stance on this issue.

"Their hope for a kinder future rests with all of us," it says.

This is the first time the CCFA and the CEFTA have bought TV time in Manitoba to highlight their concerns about gestation crates. The ad ushers viewers to a website called www.helpthepigs.ca,

which encourages visitors to take action in several ways, including donations, or by sending an e-mail to Michael McCain, president of Maple Leaf Foods, or executives at Canada's largest grocery store companies, according to a report in *The Western Producer*. CCFA and CEFTA are calling the ad successful, in terms of the response it has generated.

"This is an older campaign from the Winnipeg Humane Society, recently revamped and re-launched," says Crystal Mackay, executive director of the Ontario Farm Animal Council (OFAC). "It's an effective use of emotional images and 'sound bites' to generate awareness and fundraise for those groups."

As Mackay points out, the ad and others like it, do not capture the true essence of how surprisingly complicated sow housing really is.

"The pork industry invests

hundreds of thousands of dollars into sow housing research and has yet to find a simplistic answer," she says. "Each option has pros and cons."

For the industry, Mackay says the challenge to be proactive and "tell your story" has never been greater.

"Ideally, every person who sees those ads would have met a real farmer at a public event like the Royal or the CNE and saw some pigs before they ever saw those commercials," she says.

"The second best thing is to answer the questions of the public in a fair, open and reasonable manner, to have a discussion about how pigs are really raised."

"Recognizing that it's tough to tour 30 million people through farms, groups like OFAC and its members have invested in Virtualfarmtours.ca, so people can see how animals are raised in Canada," says Mackay.